

Mark 14:53-65 “What Religious People Think about Jesus”**

Main Idea: In Mark 14:53-65, we find out what religious people think about Jesus, for it's there that religion put Jesus on trial. The account involves four scenes.

I. Scene #1: The court scene (53-54)

- A. The most religious Jews were in charge (53).
- B. Peter was in the background (54).

II. Scene #2: The case against Jesus (55-59)

- A. There was a lack of evidence (55).
- B. There was conflicting evidence (56).
- C. There was twisted evidence (57-59).

III. Scene #3: The questioning of Jesus (60-62)

- A. Jesus did not respond at first (60-61).
- B. Jesus responded to only one question (62).
 - 1. He is the Christ.
 - 2. He is the Son of Man.
 - 3. He is equal with God.
 - 4. He is coming again.
 - 5. He will be seen by all, even His enemies.

IV. Scene #4: The verdict (63-65)

- A. They condemned the Giver of life as being worthy of death.
- B. They revealed the utter depravity of man.
 - 1. Religion cannot save for it cannot change the heart.
 - 2. Religion is a place where sinners hide in their pride.
 - 3. Religious people need what they don't think they need, the Savior.

Take it to heart: What do we learn from this?

- 1. We need to appreciate the Lord more fully.
- 2. We need to be more like the Lord.
- 3. We need to prepare to see the Lord.

It was a sad night, the saddest of nights. It was the night that religion put Jesus on trial and found Him guilty and worthy of death.

It's staggering to ponder. One would think that of all people, *religious* people should have respected and honored One so great as Jesus. After all, Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, taught truth that liberated the spiritually bound, and demonstrated unconditional and boundless love for all. Yet in the end the most religious people in Israel condemned Him to die.

Religion is often a great barrier that keeps people from Jesus. The problem, we should clarify, isn't religion. There is a good, God-endorsed type of religion, as James 1:27 puts it, a "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless," Religion that pleases God is this [again quoting James]: "to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

But unfortunately, religion in the hands of sinners quickly degenerates from "pure and faultless" to "corrupt and guilt-producing." J. D. Jones describes it this way, "A religion which has degenerated into a formalism is worse than no religion. For the form of religion has a way of searing the conscience and deadening the soul... While religion when real and true is the savor of life unto life, the same religion when nothing but a cloak and an empty form becomes the savor of death unto death!"^[1]

This morning we're going to turn in God's Word to the record of what happened that darkest of nights, the night when religion put Jesus on trial. The account has much to say to religious people—and since we are in church this morning, this would apply to us. It also shows us in vivid fashion what Jesus endured in order to rescue sinners, including religious ones. In Mark 14:53-65, we find out what religious people think about Jesus. The account involves four scenes.

I. Scene #1: The court scene (53-54)

Verse 53—"They [the mob that arrested Jesus in Gethsemane] took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together."

If ever a group should have been sympathetic to the Messiah, these men should have been! We're talking about the *priests*—God's anointed representatives for His people—and *elders*—supposed mature men who'd walked with God longer than others—and *teachers of the law*—men who knew the Scriptures better than anyone else in the land. Simply stated, at this court scene...

A. The most religious Jews were in charge (53).

The high priest was Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57). Luke's account states specifically they took Jesus to the *house* of the high priest (Luke 22:54). It was past midnight, yet the Sanhedrin assembled to interrogate Jesus. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jews, composed of 71 members. Within its membership were Sadducees (the priests), Pharisees and Scribes (who were experts in the law), and respected men who were elders.

An Overview of Jesus' Trials:

It will help us to give a brief overview of what Jesus faced that night. For starters, there were two trials, one conducted by the Jewish religious leaders and the other by the civil Roman leaders. Both of these trials involved sub-elements. The trial by the Jews, for instance, involved three stages, which we can distinguish by comparing all four gospel accounts.

Mark tells us they took Jesus to the house of Caiaphas. Actually, before arriving there the soldiers took the Lord to the house of Annas (see John 18:13).^[2] Annas was father-in-law to Caiaphas, the current high priest. Annas himself had been high priest at a previous time. Four of his sons and a son-in-law actually held the position after him which shows us that Annas was a man of great power and prestige in Israel .

The second stage of the Jewish trial is the one we'll be investing in this study, as recorded in Mark 14. In the second stage Jesus was brought before the Jewish supreme court, the Sanhedrin. The assembly took place during the night which made the court proceedings illegal according to Jewish law.

That's why the third stage followed early the next morning (Friday morning), as indicated in Mark 15:1. As soon as day broke, as soon as Jewish law said it was legal for court proceedings to occur, the Sanhedrin reassembled and, as Mark 15:1 states, "reached a decision." Of course, as we'll see momentarily, this was mere formality for their "decision" about Jesus was reached during the illegal night trial.

Then, after the Jewish trial, came the civil, Roman trial. Mark 15:1 indicates that as soon as the Jews declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy, they sent to the Roman governor, Pilate, for another trial. We should note that the reason Pilate condemned Jesus to death was different from the crime of which the Jewish Sanhedrin ascribed guilt. The Sanhedrin said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, but of course, the Romans could care less whether a man blasphemed the Jews' God. So a different charge was trumped up and thrown at Jesus when on trial before the Romans, and Pilate condemned Jesus to death, not for blasphemy but for high treason. In other words, Pilate crucified the Lord, not because He said He was the Son of God, but because He said (or rather the Jews said He said) that He was King of the Jews.^[3]

Our focus today is on phase two of the religious trial. We've discussed the presence of the Sanhedrin. In the next verse Mark mentions someone else was at Caiaphas's house.

Verse 54—"Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire." Note where Peter is.

B. Peter was in the background (54). Just minutes earlier he deserted Jesus and fled, as did the rest of the disciples (50). But now he's back, at least in the proximity of Jesus. After all, earlier that evening Peter promised Jesus that he was ready to die for his Master, if need be (31). He's rejoined his Lord, albeit at a distance. Mark says he stayed by the fire with the guards (I wonder if Malchus was there, the guard whose ear Peter severed and Jesus healed in the garden).

We can criticize Peter for hiding in the background, but at least he's in the background. There's no mention of the other disciples, save John. They're all gone. Mark will tell us what happened to Peter in the next passage.

So there's scene one—the court scene. Let's follow the text to scene two...

II. Scene #2: The case against Jesus (55-59)

In verse 55 Mark gives us the agenda for the Sanhedrin that night, and it wasn't justice. "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any."

Again, priests are supposed to be holy men, for it was their privileged assignment to represent people before God. But here the chief priests are with God Himself in front of them, and they not only don't recognize Him but want to kill Him! That's their agenda, to put Jesus to death. To accomplish their agenda they need evidence, hence the reason for this night time meeting.

Note what happened in their search for evidence, three things...

A. There was a lack of evidence (55). The end of verse 55 states, "But they did not find any." They couldn't find any factual basis to warrant killing Jesus. Of course, when someone has an agenda the lack of facts doesn't stop them. Nor did it here...

Verse 56—"Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree." First there was a lack of

evidence, then...

B. There was conflicting evidence (56). False accusations were thrown at Jesus—lies, fabrications—and by many according to Mark. The problem with lying, however, is that it's difficult to keep multiple lies straight. So it happened in this courtroom. The lies contradicted each another.

By the way, those men should have been punished for perjury for they lied in a court of justice, but I'm sure they weren't. According to Deuteronomy 17:6, two witnesses in agreement were necessary to find a man guilty and deserving of the death sentence. But that wasn't happening. So the prosecutors took a different approach...

C. There was twisted evidence (57-59). “Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’” Yet even then their testimony did not agree.”

“We heard him say!” the witnesses asserted. The problem is, Jesus *never* said what they claimed He said. The only words of Jesus that actually come close to this were words He spoke a couple of years earlier in John 2:19 when He said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” He wasn't talking about the temple building, but His own body. And He didn't say He would destroy the temple, but was stating the fact that the temple, His body, would be destroyed by others.

The witnesses are simply twisting Jesus' words, not only taking them out of context but outright changing them to build a straw man case against Him.

Tennyson once said, “A lie that is all a lie, may be met with and fought outright; But a lie that is partly the truth, is a harder matter to fight.”

It's a painful thing to be misrepresented. Perhaps you're feeling that pain right now. Know this. Your Savior understands.

The Jewish trial was a travesty.^[4] In point of fact, when the Sanhedrin tried Jesus it broke its *own* laws. In Jesus' trial, the Sanhedrin did not meet in an authorized building, which it was required to do. It met at night, which was illegal. It met during one of the Jewish feasts, which also was illegal. Their law stated that trial witnesses must be examined separately and for their evidence to be valid, it must agree in every detail--this certainly was violated in Jesus' trial. If the verdict was death, a night was to elapse before the execution was carried out so the court might have a chance to change its mind if necessary.

But there was no justice in this courtroom that night. In their eagerness to get rid of Jesus, the Jewish leaders broke their own judicial laws. Which brings us to scene three.

III. Scene #3: The questioning of Jesus (60-62)

Verse 60—“Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’”

Now there's an ironic question! *What is this testimony these men are bringing against you?* What is it? Nothing but lies, not even worthy of a response!

Verse 61—“But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.” Please note that...

A. Jesus did not respond at first (60-61). He simply stood there in silence.

We live in a society that is hung up on rights and when people don't get what they think they *deserve*, they make noise. We hear it all the time...

“I’ve got a right to be happy.”

“I’ve got a right to ventilate my feelings and tell you what I think.”

“I’ve got a right to a good marriage and if I don’t have one I’ve got a right to get out of it.”

“I’ve got a right to a comfortable home, a job with good working conditions, a nice retirement, and plenty of spending money.”

Rights. To people who dwell on ‘rights,’ the word ‘injustice’ is very distasteful. We don’t tolerate injustice (at least not when it happens to us). We fight injustice. And certainly, there are times when we should. But I want you to reflect on something. *Jesus experienced injustice.*

And how did Jesus respond to injustice? In silent submission.

“Why didn’t Jesus defend Himself?” you ask. “If He would have defended Himself, surely He could have exposed the fallacy of the accusations against Him.” But He didn’t come to defend Himself. He came to do the work His Father had given Him to do, the work of redemption, the work of the cross.

Isaiah 53:7 tells us, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

Yes, Jesus endured great injustice. And He calls us to be willing to do the same.

John Paton did just that.^[5] Paton was a wonderfully used nineteenth century missionary to New Hebrides (now known as Vanuatu), a large group of Pacific islands northeast of Australia. After graduating from school and ministering in Scotland, he was sent to New Hebrides with his wife.

The land was occupied by cannibals. When they first set shore, the Patons couldn’t speak the language of the native people. They knew that others who had come to New Hebrides were never heard from again. They went knowing that death for the sake of Christ was a very real possibility.

After only a few weeks on the island, Paton’s wife gave birth to a baby. But the baby soon died, and a few days later so did his wife. For the next three or four nights, Paton slept on the graves of his loved ones to keep the cannibals from digging them up and consuming their bodies.

Perhaps many of us would have thrown in the towel and said, “This isn’t fair. I’ve given my all for God’s service, and look what I’ve received in return...*injustice.*” But not Paton. In spite of the disastrous circumstances he remained in New Hebrides. He devoted the rest of his life to reaching the land with the gospel of Christ. In his autobiography, Paton said that as the result of his ministry, he didn’t know of a single inhabitant who had not made at least a profession of faith in Christ.

John Patton accepted the fact that Christ has not called us to a life of self-fulfillment, but rather to a life of self-denial, not to be served but to serve—even if that service involves hardship and at times injustice. He did not live for the approval of men but for the approval of his heavenly Father who promises heavenly reward for His obedient sons.

When the questions came Jesus did not respond, not at first. Now notice the end of verse 61—“Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’” The high priest is so ‘religious’ he uses the title ‘Blessed One’ to avoid saying the name of God (which Jews considered blasphemous). How ironic! He won’t say the name of God, but he’ll kill the Son of God!

The parallel account of Matthew 26:63 adds further light on how desperate the priest was for an answer: “The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’”

Barclay comments, “He asked the very kind of question that the law completely forbade. He asked a leading

question. It was forbidden to ask questions by answering which the person on trial might incriminate himself. No man could be asked to condemn himself, but that was the very question the High Priest asked.”^[6]

At that point Jesus broke His silence. In His trial...

B. Jesus responded to only one question (62). And it was this question, “Are you the Christ?”

Verse 62—“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Although brief Jesus communicated volumes with that reply. We learn five important truths about Jesus from His answer.

1. *He is the Christ.* Jesus here claimed to be the long-awaited, promised Messiah. Until this moment He had kept His Messiahship veiled from the public. But now, in the presence of His enemies, He makes a public, clear statement, one that He knows will result in His death. *I am*, He says.

You say, “I still don’t understand why Jesus answered *this* question when He refused to speak earlier.” I’m not entirely sure, but this is clear. By answering this question Jesus is forcing His critics (and us) to face *the issue*. He claimed to be God’s Chosen One, the Christ, not one option amongst many, but the only option, *The Christ*. That’s His claim. That’s the issue of all issues. What will we now do with His claim? What will we do with Him?

But He said more. He asserted secondly...

2. *He is the Son of Man.* “You will see the Son of Man...” Jesus used this title for Himself more than any other title (81 times in the Gospels). It may not mean much to our western ears, but it did to the Jews. The prophet Daniel used it to refer to the end time Deliverer who would come from heaven. Listen to what he wrote in Daniel 7:13-14:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was *one like a son of man*, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

“That’s Me,” Jesus stated. “I’ve come from heaven. I’ve been given authority and will be worshipped by all men. My kingdom will not pass away. I am the Son of Man.”

3. *He is equal with God.* Note where He said He, the Son of Man, would be sitting—“at the right hand of the Mighty One.” That title refers to God. To assert that He will sit at the right hand of God is to assert equality with God. The imagery comes from Psalm 110:1 where David writes, “The LORD [that’s God] says to my Lord [that’s the coming Messiah]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”

By His response to Caiaphas Jesus was claiming to be the One David prophesied in Psalm 110:1. That’s a staggering claim. And so is this...

4. *He is coming again.* “You will see the Son of Man...coming on the clouds of heaven.” Once again, that comes right out of the Messianic prophecy of Daniel 7:13, where Daniel said, “There before me was one like a son of man, *coming with the clouds of heaven*.”

Let this sink in, my friend. Jesus is about to be sentenced to death, but makes it very clear that death will not be His end. He is predicting His second coming. Yes, He came the first time as a lowly babe in an obscure manger, but when He comes the second time He will come with the clouds of heaven, that is, He will come in great splendor and majesty. He came the first time to die as a sacrificial lamb, but He will come the second time to rule as King over all. And who will see Him then? Jesus told Caiaphas the answer...

5. *He will be seen by all, even His enemies.* Hear His words again: “And *you will see*.” Stop there. Who will see? *You* will, Caiaphas. *You* will, elders and teachers of the law. *You* will, every one of you will see.^[7]

See what? “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” He says they would see Him doing two things: *sitting* and *coming*. You will see Me sitting at God’s right hand, and you will see Me coming with the clouds of heaven in triumph. You are judging Me now, but the day is coming when I will come and judge you.

My friend, you will see Him, too. Every eye will see Him (Rev. 1:7). Every knee will bow before Him (Phil. 2:10). Every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:11). The question is, *are you ready to see Him?* If you know Jesus only as a cuddly baby in a manger, you’re not ready. To be ready you must know Him as your Savior and Lord.

The court scene, the case against Jesus, the questioning of Jesus, now scene four...

IV. Scene #4: The verdict (63-65)

Verse 63—“The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked.” Any *more* witnesses? The previous witnesses hadn’t proven a thing but merely contradicted each other.

Verse 64—“‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’” The sad fact is that he never even considered the possibility that Jesus’ claim was true. Jesus told him flat out that He was the Christ. The high priest willfully and deliberately shut his ears to the possibility. Having done so, his only other option was the one he chose. He called for Jesus’ condemnation. So did the others...

Verse 64 concludes, “They all condemned him as worthy of death.” Ponder that...

A. They condemned the Giver of life as being worthy of death. Although they didn’t recognize it, before them is the One who had given them life. At that very moment He was giving them the breath they needed to utter the words they spoke, and with their words they said He deserved to die.

But what they’ve decided they don’t have the authority to carry out. For starters, it’s the middle of the night and their court proceeding is illegal. In addition, only the Romans can authorize capital punishment. So they take a recess and propose to meet again at daybreak for the “official” trial (15:1). And once their religious trial ends, a civil, Roman trial will follow as we’ll see when we come to chapter 15.

Verse 65—“Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards took him and beat him.” Allow me to remind you that these are *religious* people treating Jesus in such inhumane ways. In so doing...

B. They revealed the utter depravity of man. It’s bad enough to condemn an innocent man. But to spit at him, strike him with one’s fists, and to beat him mercilessly...this reveals the horrid condition of depraved hearts, even if those depraved hearts are tucked away inside a religious façade.

I believe we learn three realities about religion right here...

1. *Religion cannot save for it cannot change the heart.* These men read their Bibles, participated in worship services, gave money to charity, and did all sorts of other religious deeds. But their hearts were black with sin, and their condition was exposed the moment One who was truly righteous entered their presence.

The problem isn’t Bible reading, participating in worship services, giving money to charity, and so on. The problem is thinking that religious activity merits favor in the eyes of God. It doesn’t. It can’t. Religion lacks the power to change a sinful heart.

2. *Religion is a place where sinners hide in their pride.* That’s our fundamental problem. We are *proud*. We think we’re okay, we’re *good* people, in spite of the fact that God declares in His Word that we are depraved sinners. If you had asked Caiaphas or the others that night, “Are you sure you are doing the right thing?” they would have

answered, “Absolutely! We are doing God’s work! We are very religious!”

But their religion was merely a place where they could hide in their pride.

Quite frankly, there are not a few people doing the same in churches this morning. They don’t see themselves as sinners in need of grace, but as good people doing good things for God.

3. *Religious people need what they don’t think they need, the Savior.* Simply put, religious people need what all people need. They need to be saved. They need the Holy Spirit to open their eyes so that they admit their hopeless condition as sinners. They need to place their faith in Jesus and the work He accomplished at the cross for them. They need to receive the Risen Jesus as their Savior and Master. They need for God to do for them what they cannot do for themselves, no matter how religious they have been.

Take it to heart: What do we learn from this?

Three simple lessons...

1. *We need to appreciate the Lord more fully.* O what He suffered for us, beloved!

2. *We need to be more like the Lord.* Reflecting on that night Peter later wrote in 1 Peter 2:21, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, *leaving you an example*, that you should follow in his steps.” Perhaps you are facing injustice, mistreatment by cruel individuals. Do you see the opportunity your Savior is giving you, to *follow in His steps*, and in so doing, to fulfill your calling and point people to Him?

We’ve looked at four scenes today, but we haven’t seen the final scene. The One the religious leaders rejected, the One who died for sinners on Calvary’s cross, the One who rose from the dead three days later and returned back to heaven, is now seated on His heavenly throne. The day is coming, perhaps today, when He will come with the clouds of heaven, and He who was unjustly judged by men will judge men justly. Therefore...

3. *We need to prepare to see the Lord.* Today is the day of salvation.

****Note:** This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] J. D. Jones, p. 586.

[2] Caiaphas was the high priest who was acceptable to Rome . Annas, his father-in-law, was actually the high priest according to Mosaic Law. John’s account says that Jesus was brought first to Annas. –J. McGee, p. 178.

[3] Observation by J. D. Jones, p. 583.

[4] See Barclay, pp. 349-50

[5] Story taken from J. MacArthur’s “Grace to You” letter, 3/24/95.

[6] Barclay, p. 350.

[7] The verb (“you will see”) is plural.